

УДК: 13.00.01

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## **THE IMPORTANCE OF USING EDUCATIONAL GAMES TO TEACH YOUNG LEARNERS**

*Annotation:* This article attempts to determine the role of educational games on learning a foreign language, and to explore how games are important and effective when used in English foreign language classrooms.

*Key words:* Games, foreign language, classroom, young earners

## **ВАЖНОСТЬ ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЯ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНЫХ ИГР ДЛЯ ОБУЧЕНИЯ МОЛОДЫХ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ**

*Аннотация:* в данной статье делается попытка определить роль образовательных игр в изучении иностранного языка и выяснить, насколько игры важны и эффективны при использовании в классах английского языка.

*Ключевые слова:* игры, иностранный язык, аудитория, молодые работники.

Language learning is a difficult work. Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. As we need meaningfulness in language learning, and authentic use of the language it is useful to follow and create many different techniques and procedures. That through creative procedure we can have an interactive environment which may lead to an improvement in learning a foreign language.

A game should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do. Games are fun and children like to play them, through games children experiment, discover,

and interact with their environment, games add variation to a lesson and increase motivation by providing a plausible incentive to use the target language. Games have a good effect on improving the achievement for the primary stage and to create an interactive environment. It is recommended to use games since they are very effective especially for the primary stages in teaching a second language and games are helpful for the teacher as a procedure for language acquisition.

Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages, games should be used at all the stages of the lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen. Games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in a pleasant, entertaining way. All agree that even if games resulted only in noise and entertained students, they are still worth paying attention to and implementing in the classroom, since they motivate learners, promote communicative competence and generate fluency and may have a significant role in improving a second language learning. Although some teachers of English see language games as time consumers or classroom techniques for fun, games have a special role in any foreign language teaching program because they facilitate foreign language learning especially for young learners. With the introduction of communicative language teaching, English language teaching and learning has become much more demanding for teachers and learners just like any other innovation poses challenges for its users. Games have become extremely important for English language learners and teachers not only because they provide enjoyment and relaxation, but also as they encourage students to use their language in a creative and communicative manner. Similarly, because the definition of the term “young learners” encapsulates those children between the ages of about 5 years old to 12 years old , it can be suggested that games are a natural part of young learners’ lives. It should be born in mind that language learning is a challenging task requiring constant effort especially for young learners.

Games encourage learners to direct their energy towards language learning by providing them with meaningful contexts .

Therefore, it is crucially important that teachers should not see games as time fillers or tools designed for fun only, but integrate them into their foreign language teaching program. What is common in all these descriptions is the fact that games involve many factors such as employing rules, fostering cooperation while making learning fun. One can simply say that games are enjoyable. However, in addition to being enjoyable, games refer to rules to be followed pointing at a serious instructional planning and delivery process.

As expressed by Lee games have a very clear beginning and ending and they are governed by rules. Competition, which is associated with games, plays a crucial role as for the nature of games requires . Learners are excited by competition because the question of who will win or lose remains unanswered until the game is over. Similarly, games' making learning easier in an enjoyable way suggests that games are full of fun which leads to successful learning. In many games, learners are required to cooperate to achieve the goal and most learners enjoy cooperation and social interaction. It is believed that when cooperation and interaction are combined with fun, successful learning becomes more possible.

Games provide language teachers with many advantages when they are used in classroom. One of these advantages is that learners are motivated to learn the language when they are in a game.

McCallum emphasizes this point by suggesting that “games automatically stimulate student interest, a properly introduced game can be one of the highest motivating techniques.” In other words, games stimulate students' interest in classroom activities and as a result, students become motivated and willing to learn.

Another advantage associated with games is that students' anxiety towards language learning decreases as games are employed. In language

classes, learners feel stressful because they think that they have to master the target language that is unknown to them. Besides, learners become too anxious about being criticized and punished by their teachers when they make a mistake. Games are advantageous at this point because they reduce anxiety, increase positive feelings and improve self-confidence because learners do not afraid of punishment or criticism while practicing the target language freely.

As a result, games provide learners with a chance to direct their own learning. From an instructional view point, creating a meaningful context for language use is another advantage that games present. By using games, teachers can create contexts which enable unconscious learning because learners' attention is on the message, not on the language.

Games bring real-life situations to the confinement of the classroom which provides learners with an opportunity to use the language.

McCallum explains that there are many advantages of games such as the fact that they:

1. focus students' attention on specific structures, grammatical patterns, and vocabulary items.
2. can function as reinforcement, review and enrichment.
3. involve equal participation from both slow and fast learners.
4. can be adjusted to suit the individual age and language levels of the students.
5. contribute to an atmosphere of healthy competition, providing an outlet for the creative use of natural language in a non-stressful situation.
6. can be used in any language teaching situations and with all skill areas (reading, writing, speaking or listening)
7. provide immediate feedback for the teacher.
8. ensure maximum student participation for a minimum of teacher preparation.

The fact that games are the most suitable instructional activities for young learners is obvious because they are a natural part of their existence.

Nedomova argues that “young learners are not able to pay their attention for more than 10-20 minutes and after that they start to be bored and tired.” Especially when grammar teaching is too dependent on rules and memorization, they start to lose their interest and motivation. Teachers know that young learners like being physically active as they learn by doing. Moreover, they are imaginative and creative and they learn without being aware of it. Besides, young learners use their previous experience, knowledge, several skills, and abilities which help the teacher present the new information by enabling children to practice the new knowledge on top of their previous knowledge .

Therefore, the best way to direct this capacity in grammar teaching is using games. Bekiri states that when a lesson includes a game, the game gives a chance to the teacher to help learners acquire new forms and lexis in an effective way. It should not be a complicated game, but a simple one because it is usually more effective as young learners find it difficult to understand a long list of rules. Similarly, games should also include praise and encouragement because young learners always love to be the centre of attention. In addition to all these, it should be born in mind that games should be as short as possible because as mentioned before, young learners are able to pay their attention to the games just for a limited time.

Hong gives some suggestions to teachers about using games for teaching young learners by claiming that:

- a. When giving instructions to beginners, a few words in the mother tongue would be the quickest way to make everything clear. More English exposure is needed at a later stage.
- b. Games are best set up by demonstration rather than by lengthy explanation.

c. It is very important not to play a game for too long. Students will begin to lose interest. It is best to stop a game at its peak.

However, it should be taken into consideration that as they are young learners, teaching them through games requires special effort from the teacher.

Most of the participants express that this is because of the crowded classroom environments and the heavy load of the curriculum. With accurate planning and information passed onto the teachers, this problem should be dealt with to secure the benefits of games in the foreign language classroom.

Lastly, in coursebooks and materials, the use of games can be emphasized and by presenting alternative games, foreign language teaching can be enriched so that primary school students enjoy learning English in a robust manner.

To sum up, games have a great pedagogical value providing language teachers with many advantages when they are used in foreign language classes. The review of the studies related to language games indicates that games are crucially important in foreign language teaching and learning in a variety of areas.

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